

# SAFE FOODS: THE HINDU EDITORIAL ON THE NEED TO DEVELOP FOOD LABORATORY INFRASTRUCTURE IN STATES

Relevant for: Indian Economy | Topic: Food processing and related industries in India: scope and significance, location, upstream and downstream requirements and supply chain management

Food safety and consumer empowerment are areas in need of constant attention in India, where enforcement is often lax. But in this, Tamil Nadu deserves credit for [finishing at the top among 17 large States for food safety](#); it was ranked third in the previous edition of the State Food Safety Index. That Tamil Nadu, with 82 marks, is ahead of Gujarat by 4.5 marks and Maharashtra by 12 marks, highlights its creditable showing. Developed by the Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI), the Food Safety Index evaluates States and Union Territories on these parameters, apart from their size: human resources and institutional data; compliance; food testing – infrastructure and surveillance; training and capacity building, and consumer empowerment. Tamil Nadu has improved its standing in ‘human resources and institutional data’, and ‘training and capacity building’. There has been incremental progress in ‘compliance’ (which measures overall coverage of food businesses in licensing and registration), and ‘food testing’ (which scrutinises availability of adequate testing infrastructure with trained manpower in the States/Union Territories for testing food samples). The State has performed marginally lower than what it did last year in ‘consumer empowerment’. But barring Tamil Nadu, there is nothing for the other southern States to cheer about despite the region being more advanced than the rest of India in many socio-economic indicators. Kerala, which came second last time, is now at sixth spot; Karnataka has retained its ninth position; Telangana slipped from 10 to 15 and Andhra Pradesh dropped to the last slot from the penultimate slot in the previous edition when 20 States were covered, unlike the 17 now. Among Union Territories, Puducherry rose from seventh to sixth spot.

But in an area such as food safety, States alone cannot make a big difference without the support of the Central government. Liberal assistance should be provided to the States and Union Territories as far as laboratory infrastructure and improvement of manpower, both technical and non-technical, are concerned. The private sector should come forward in a big way to have staff trained at their cost and where such persons are used productively for the purpose. There are inspiring accounts of the participation of some information technology majors in getting surplus food distributed to the needy, of course with the help of non-governmental organisations, and this should serve as a lesson to those who are still hesitant to make their contribution. What every player in the field of food safety should realise is that each one has a critical role to play, and there has to be collective and well-coordinated action.

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